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ABSTRACT

Although it is clear that adult education has existed much longer as a field of practice than as a field of study, little research exists to identify the contribution that an understanding of the field of adult education, particularly adult learning and techniques for teaching adult students, makes to the effectiveness of an adult educator. To study the gap that exists between the beliefs underlying the field of adult education and actual practice, 318 articles from 48 professional journals for adult educators and three texts that are required reading in a course in the theory and practice of adult education methodology were compared with respect to their treatment of the following four topics: continuing education, the adult learner, teaching methods, and adult educators. The review indicated that although the professional literature promotes a belief structure to the field, the professional journals do not carry that message to the practitioner. Rather, the journals devote more energy to the management and administration of programs, and, therefore, the practitioner is not able to look to the professional journals as a prime source of support. Thus, while the field of adult education is growing, the support systems to keep it healthy are diminishing. The challenge then is to provide for the support and dissemination of a working philosophy to the field. The promotion of the ideas and concepts of adult education is as vital a part of the chain by which adult education organizes and maintains itself as is training in how to carry out these beliefs. (MN)

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IDENTIFYING THE GAP BETWEEN THE BELIEFS IN ADULT EDUCATION AND WHAT IS PROMOTED TO THE PRACTITIONER

Theory and Practice of Adult
Education Methodology

by

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ABSTRACT

The field of adult education does not have a common philosophy promoted by the experts, however a belief system is promoted as a working philosophy. The four categories of beliefs promoted in adult education concern: beliefs about continuing education, the adult learner, the teaching/learning process and the adult education teacher/practitioner. The beliefs are well promoted by the experts to other experts, however the real working world does not exhibit consistent evidence of this belief system. The practitioner is not exhibiting these beliefs which are portrayed as making adult education different than childhood education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the gap that exists between the beliefs of the field and what is promoted to the teacher/practitioner.

This case study was developed by establishing the background and current status of the beliefs and investigated the interactions with the field via a literature review. Four professional journals covering the past two years were reviewed to identify the extent of promotion to practitioners in the field.

The results showed that 65% of the articles in this literature review addressed administration, management and program development while 35% covered the beliefs. Of the 35% addressing beliefs, half of this information developed the concept of beliefs about continuing education. If the beliefs of the field are critical to the education of adults, institutionalized adult education needs to focus on promoting and providing training in these areas of beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the gap that exists between the beliefs of the field of adult education and the promotion of those beliefs to the teacher/practitioner. A review of the recommended resources in Theory and Practice in Adult Education Methodology provided an excellent view of the conceptual base in adult education; it, as well, pointed out the discrepancies which exist in the field. The most apparent discrepancies identified were the lack of an agreed upon philosophy and definition for the multi-faceted field, and the gap between the stated beliefs of the field and the promotion of those beliefs to the practitioner. This last discrepancy referred to the gap that exists between the stated beliefs of the field, and what, in reality, actually existed in day-to-day operations.

Within adult education, there are many definitions of the field, each based on the functional division from which it eminates. This confusion and disagreement presented a problem in describing and labeling the field of adult education (Apps 1979:93-124) not only for those supporters, funders and practitioners, but for the practitioners interpreting the field. The leaders have not presented a common philosophy for a base of reference, rather, a belief system is presented whereby the author presents what s/he regards as true or factual (Klevins 1982:26). "Stress is placed on the individual adult educator's understanding his or her own beliefs about adult education" (Klevins 1982:27). The beliefs in adult education are about the adult learner, the teaching/learning process, the purpose of the field and

the role of the teacher. These same beliefs are proficiencies promoted toward enhancing the effectiveness of the teacher/practitioner (Knox 1979:67-75).

The tremendous growth of adult education, the need for the re-training of teachers and the increased developments in the education of adults further compound the position of the teacher. In reality, the position of the adult education teacher/practitioner is part-time and short-termed. The entering practitioner in adult education typically lacks a detailed understanding of adults as learners and the specific procedures for helping adults learn. Practitioners were not trained for their positions so they had to rely upon their previous knowledge of teaching strategies and teaching skills.

This case study has been developed by establishing the background and current status of the beliefs of the field and has applied those beliefs to a literature review in order to determine the environmental interactions of the field. This case study has established the discrepancy which exists between the stated beliefs of the field and what is actually promoted via the professional literature. It is at the practitioner level that the essence of education is applied. Therefore, it would be most expedient for institutionalized adult education to promote its beliefs to the practitioner in order to impact the education of adults in that manner which it professes to do.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The nature of adult education in the mid-80's reflects a diverse and complex system struggling with a traditional institutional concept of education (Ulmer 1981:3-21), yet exhibiting a tremendous desire to impact a learning society. Readings relating to the background of adult education are slight from the year 1926 when the field was delineated, to yesterday, the 1960's when adult education became of age. The Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, which made provisions for Adult Basic Education and the passage of the Adult Education Act in 1966, financially created adult education. However, its meaning was created from the psychology, sociology and physiology relating to human learning and behavior, along with the years of findings from pragmatic teachers following their own intuition for learning. Adult education has existed as a field of practice much longer than it has existed as a field of study (Long 1983:262).

The scope of adult education is so tremendous that it is no wonder there is confusion concerning descriptions and labels (Apps 1981:59-102). A mission to satisfy all the needs and goals of individuals, institutions and society is a ubiquitous task. Therefore, definitions, purposes, roles and philosophies presented tended to limit the field thus creating problems with representation and agreement of terms. There was even disagreement about the need for agreement.

The recognition of the realities of adult education is essential. For adult education to impact the learning society, it must be in a position to promote what it does best. That promotion,

at this point, can not be made via definitions of the field nor through reference to a basic philosophy. A working philosophy of adult education does exist and is rooted in the beliefs about how adults should be educated. The beliefs of adult education established through other fields of study and via the findings in adult development and adult behavior, provide the operating framework for the field (Apps 1982: 25-32) (Long 1983:309) (Knox 1979:2-21) (Knowles 1980:40-62) (Grabowski 1981:1-4, 41-46). It is within these belief areas that Knox developed Enhancing Proficiencies of Continuing Educators, which was designed to "identify the major areas of proficiencies (through which) effective practitioners weave...their deliberate strategies to help adults learn" (Knox 1979:2). The judgment of practitioner effectiveness then is determined by the proficiency in these belief areas of working philosophy in adult education. Within this working philosophy are found the adult learning principles and theories: the uniqueness of the adult learner, concepts of the teaching/learning process, beliefs about the continuing education, and how the teacher/practitioner applies this knowledge. It is the practitioner who develops a philosophy of adult education and the effectiveness of the practitioner is judged by the extent to which s/he carries out the working philosophy. It will also be the degree of success of the practitioner in carrying out the theories, concepts and principles that will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the field itself.

Two sources of beliefs are evident: experience and authority. Teachers and administrators coming to adult education are from other fields of education. They have not acquired a trained background in adult education. With funding increases, employment increases

and an expanding knowledge base occurring, it is paramount that the beliefs established by authority be distributed to the teacher/practitioner. The findings of the experts and the research would provide some semblence of continuity and will enrich experiences for the development of the practitioner's personal beliefs. As previously stated, emphasis is placed on the practitioner understanding his/her own beliefs about adult education. In retraining teachers to work effectively with adults, two major elements are noted: learning the beliefs of the field (authority) and practice (experience) (Schmitt 1984:7).

There is little research to identify what contribution an understanding of the field makes toward effectiveness of the teacher/practitioner. "However, writers about the field repeatedly refer to how important it is that practitioners have a perspective on scope, trends and issues" (Knox 1979:10). Several points must be made. Adult education promotes a "different" way of teaching than is utilized in childhood education. And, the majority of adult educators have come from the schools of childhood education. One must be enlightened to this "different" process which denotes some understanding of the process and the ability to practice it. Increased understanding can be gained by observation of others, participation in training sessions and courses, via a socialization process with others and by the reading of books, journals and newsletters that deal with various segments of the field. Through understanding, practitioners are able to be innovative, to recognize and respond to issues and trends, and to adapt their skills. "Those practitioners who do acquire detailed insights and research generalizations, do so mainly through reading the

professional literature..."(Knox 1979:14). Knox advances that the proficiencies for concepts about both adult development and adult learning are acquired mainly through experience and reading (Knox 1979:17). Following this thinking then, the professional literature would prove to be the source one would look to for current findings in the field, to develop a feeling for the trends that might exist, and to secure an understanding of the beliefs of the field. New continuing education teachers who already have acquired their subject expertise could hope to find specific procedures for helping adults learn. Those practitioners with experience outside education might hope to find very basic information about teaching adults, the role of the practitioner and specifics about the teaching/learning process. The most current research based generalizations for the field could expect to be found in the literature as well.

Researching a problem naturally causes one to focus on causes and solutions. Rather, this study was developed to investigate modes of operation. The literature is filled with recommendations, beliefs, philosophies, purposes, yet how are they promoted? These research findings, theories and beliefs must be in the hands of the practitioner in order to become a living testament to adult education. At this point the professionals publishing the texts promote their ideas to other professionals. This study investigated the extent to which the beliefs of the field are promoted to the practitioners. Four professional journals judged to be readily available to teachers have been reviewed covering the past two years subscriptions. The frequency of beliefs about the field of continuing education, about the adult learner, about the teaching/learning process and about the

adult educator have been reviewed and analyzed as one measure of interpreting the promotion of beliefs in adult education.

The assumption cannot be made that since one is employed in adult education, one is knowledgeable about adult and continuing education in the 80's. In most recent years, according to the administrators at State Education Department (SED) in New York State, there has been a breaking of the ties between academia and the SED: a break between the research and knowledge base and the source of funds and technical assistance to programs. And, training programs for new adult education coordinators are no longer provided. The support systems in adult education, whether colleges or state education departments, need to critically review their roles and relationships as support components for adult education toward impacting the learning society.

Definition of Terms

Adult learning principles refer to the characteristics in adult learning which guide the methods and techniques applied to teaching, for example: participatory learning, goal-oriented learning, group learning, and so on.

Beliefs/belief system is the working philosophy of adult education. A philosophy of adult education has not been set forth to guide the field, rather a belief system is utilized whereby the underlying principles, concepts and theories are promoted. Beliefs are true or factual statements based on experience and authority.

Beliefs about the adult learner include those findings essential to the

promotion of adult learning, for example; learning styles, motivation, life cycle, physiology, developmental tasks, and barriers to learning.

Beliefs about continuing education include findings essential to the promotion of adult learning, for example; philosophy/beliefs, purpose, theory, principles, accountability and needs.

Beliefs about the teaching/learning process include findings essential to the promotion of adult learning, for example: teaching styles, teaching strategies, assessment, participatory learning, group process, curriculum, instructional design and models, self-directed learning and active learning.

Beliefs about the adult educator include findings essential to the promotion of adult learning, for example; role of the teacher, characteristics of effective teachers, philosophy/beliefs, teaching style, and teacher communications.

Practitioner for the purpose of this paper refers to that person responsible for the instruction of adults. It may be a college educator teaching adult students, a sixth grade math teacher teaching adult evening basic skills, a high school French teacher instructing English as a Second Language (ESL) or a local artist teaching drawing and painting. As well, the practitioner may be a full time instructor in an adult reading labratory.

Promotion in this study refers to any of the steps involved in getting an idea across including awareness of the ides, selling the idea and educating about the idea.

Basic Assumptions

The development of this study assumed that the working philosophy of adult education addressed the salient beliefs of the field and therefore represented the necessary characteristics for this literature review. Several sources present the four areas of beliefs represented in this study which further advanced that assumption. The specific characteristics within each of the four belief areas were also so identified for the review.

It is assumed as well that the professional journals selected are in fact the best representation of periodicals for this review.

Limitations of the Study

The literature review was limited to address only those activities in adult education which occur within the framework of a school setting. Neither the interests of business and industry nor the interests of associations, organizations and clubs were included.

The intent of the review was to further code the literature by designating the promotion as awareness, advertisement or education. However, the study was so limited in responses in some of the belief areas that no generalizations could be made by this further coding. Therefore, the coding was not carried out.

Further limitations seem to be a characteristic of the field. Adult education is a relatively new field and is in much need of further research of its own. Priorities in the field to date appear to be the development of a system of adult education. Further development of this limitation is found in the results section.

PROCEDURES

The procedure selected to investigate the gap that exists between the beliefs of the field of adult education and the promotion of those beliefs to the practitioners was a review of selected professional journals.

The three required texts for course development in The Theory and Practice in Adult Education Methodology provided the basis for the development of a list of beliefs in the field of adult education. The required texts were:

How Adults Learn

Materials and Methods in Adult Continuing Education

The Modern Practice of Adult Education

The consistency in beliefs from these sources represents the field. Lists of beliefs were then categorized into basic units. The four basic units of beliefs when categorized were identical to the areas of understanding for effective practitionership as provided by Knox (1979: 2-21):

- beliefs about continuing education
- beliefs about adult learners
- beliefs about the teaching/learning process
- beliefs about the adult educator/practitioner

At this point, grids were developed for each area of belief including the characteristics for review. There was no intent to exclude any characteristics in the belief areas, only to produce a manageable review. Sample grids are presented as Appendix A.

The Continuing and Community Education Information Service

(CCEIS) at the State Education Department, Albany, New York, recommended the selected periodicals for review: Adult Education Quarterly, Community and Junior College Journal, Community Education Journal and Lifelong Learning. It was felt that these periodicals would be most readily available to practitioners at their institutional settings. The past two years' periodicals were reviewed and recorded on the grids. Whenever articles represented additional characteristics of a belief, those topics were added to the grid as well. The four sets of grids were repeated for each set of periodicals, totaling 16 grids. Two journals are published 4 times yearly and two journals are published 8 times yearly producing a total of 48 periodicals reviewed. The data was then manipulated to reach conclusions about the promotion of the beliefs in adult education.

RESULTS

The literature review of the four journals covering the past two years resulted in classifying 318 articles from the 48 periodicals. Each of the 318 articles which addressed a specific belief was tabulated accordingly. Three tables present the findings: Table 1 presents a composite review of the findings by periodical and article, while Table 2 and Table 3 present percentage distributions. Reference to the periodicals are by the following designations:

LL = Lifelong Learning

AEQ = Adult Education Quarterly

CJCJ = Community and Junior College Journal

CEJ = Community Education Journal

Table 1

Composite Review by Periodical and Article

Beliefs	LL	AEQ	CJCJ	CEJ	Totals
About Cont. Ed.	34	12	5	1	52
About the Learner	18	9	0	4	31
About Teaching	6	5	3	0	14
About the Teacher	9	3	1	1	14
Other	30	12	101	64	207
Totals	97	41	110	70	318

Table 1 presents a breakdown of each journal illustrating the total articles published during the past two years and the distribution of articles published pertaining to the four areas of basic beliefs about: continuing education, the learner, the teaching/learning process and the teacher/practitioner. The total 318 articles are also shown distributed by journal. The "other" category is the compilation of all articles published which did not address the area of beliefs. A total of 318 articles published included 207 articles in areas other than the beliefs. A total of 111 articles reviewed addressed the beliefs of adult education. Major topics in the "other" category addressed administration, management and development of programs.

The information has been further manipulated in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Percentage Distribution by Articles

Articles	% Total Distribution	% Beliefs Distribution
Other	65%	0
About Cont. Ed.	17%	46.9%
About the Learner	10%	27.9%
About Teaching	4%	12.6%
About the Teacher	4%	12.6%

Table 3

Percentage Distribution by Journals

Journal	% Total Distribution	% Beliefs Distribution
Lifelong Learning	21.1%	60.4%
Adult Education Quarterly	9.1%	26.1%
Community and Junior College Journal	2.8%	8.1%
Community Education Journal	1.8%	5.4%

Tables 2 and 3 indicate the distribution of the total review of 318 articles by article and by periodical. The results show 65% of the articles in the total literature review pertained to articles/ topics other than the beliefs. Of the total beliefs discussed, 46.9% related to the beliefs about continuing education. Only 4% of the

articles relayed any information about the teaching/learning process or about the teacher/practitioner. In total distribution, 10% of the readings presented information about the adult learner.

Table 3 is similar in that of the articles presented in the total review, 21.1% of the Lifelong Learner articles addressed beliefs of the field. And of the 111 total belief articles, Lifelong Learner provided 60.4% of them. Adult Education Quarterly provided 9.1% of the articles promoting adult education beliefs whereas the Community and Junior College Journal and Community Education Journal combined contributed 4.6%.

Discussion and Implications

The conclusions reached from this study should awaken the leaders of adult education to the realization that a tremendous gap does exist in the educational chain. Professional journals, during the past two years, have not proved a major source for the promotion of the adult education belief structure. Approximately one-third of the total articles referred to the area of beliefs. The specific beliefs about the teaching/learning process and about the teacher represented a mere 8%. Lifelong Learning appears to be a source of assistance should the practitioner desire to pursue the journals. Even at that, less than one-quarter of the articles addressed beliefs. The conclusions are that the professional literature promotes a belief structure to the field however the professional journals do not carry that message to the practitioner. The journals promote more energy to the management and administration of programs. The practitioner is not able to look to the professional journals as a prime source of

support.

This review of the literature might lead the practitioner to project that the most important beliefs are about continuing education and about the learner; of less importance is the teacher and the teaching/learning process. Nowhere in the presentation of the beliefs by the experts was there any reference to value or weighting of beliefs. The skewed reporting does not represent a planned effort by the educational journals.

The overall conclusions regarding the promotion for upgrading or awareness for the practitioners of adult education pertaining to their basic working philosophy was found lacking. While the field grows, administrators seek and find professional support, yet the practitioner may be carrying on much as might have occurred during the early history of adult education. The practitioner may be learning by trial-and-error, how to teach adults and discover their new role. Experience is still a dynamic teacher.

This situation creates such a paradox: as the field is expanding, the support systems to keep it healthy are diminishing. The challenge then is to provide for the support and the dissemination of the working philosophy to the field. Or, perhaps it is time, after more than twenty years of growth and activity in adult education, to formalize a philosophy of adult education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Summer 1985 issue of ERIC Clipboard, the Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education newsletter, included the recruiting and retaining of quality teachers, and teaching/learning as

key issues which have emerged during the past year. It identified the need to make more effective use of part time teachers, transition teachers and volunteers through improved inservice training and supervisory arrangements. Other needs identified the establishment of certification standards for adult education teachers, and classroom management methods are needed. The problems, issues and concerns are being recognized.

A much more basic concern stimulated by this study is the committment of education to organize and maintain itself. For instance, an educational chain does exist: theory, experts, research impact curriculum, instruction and process. Part of that chain includes the promotion of the ideas and concepts as well as training needed in carrying out those components. This promotion and training phase is weak or missing. Therefore, the local project is left to promote and to train staff along with managing programs. The responsibilities in the chain evidently are not clear and need to be focused. The teacher is key to the adult education process, for implementing the beliefs of adult education. The support systems enabling this process need to be revitalized or recreated.

"The fundamental discrepancy between the actual and the desirable proficiency of continuing education teachers arises from the lack of systematic effort toward improvement" (Knox 1979:54). The recommendations made by Knox in 1979 are still valid today. An understanding of the proficiencies will first increase attention toward improved satisfactory performance. Then self-directed study, use of planning procedures that enhance proficiencies, along with staff development activities can assist in improvement. An awareness

of the discrepancy by the professional journals may also reap benefits for the practitioner.

These concepts require cooperation, coordination and concentration of efforts. The possibilities for developmental studies evolving from this approach would further the efforts for future directions.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE GRIDS

SAMPLE GRID:

COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGE JOURNAL

BELIEFS ABOUT
CONTINUING EDUCATION

	Sept 83	Nov 83	Dec/Jan 84	Feb 84	Mar 84	Apr 84	May/June 84	Aug/Sept 84	Oct 84	Nov 84	Dec/Jan 85	Feb 85	Mar 85	Apr 85	May/June 85	Aug/Sept 85	
Philosophy																	
Purpose																	
Needs																	
Theory																	
Principles																	
Accountability																	

SAMPLE GRID:

LIFELONG LEARNING

BELIEFS ABOUT
THE LAERNER

	Sept 85	June 85	May 85	Apr 85	Feb 85	Jan 85	Nov 84	Oct 84	Sept 84	June 84	May 84	Apr 84	Feb 84	Jan 84	Nov 83	Oct 83	
Learning Style																	
Characteristics																	
Ability to Learn																	
Adult Behavior																	
Developmental Tasks																	
Purpose for Learning																	
Special Populations																	
Recruitment																	
Barriers																	
Motivation																	

SAMPLE GRID:

COMMUNITY EDUCATION JOURNAL

BELIEFS ABOUT
THE ADULT EDUCATOR

	July 85	April 85	Jan 85	Oct 84	July 84	April 84	Jan 84	Oct 83	
Role									
Characteristics									
Philosophy									
Professional Develop.									
Teaching Style									
Retraining									

SAMPLE GRID:

ADULT EDUCATION QUARTERLY

BELIEFS ABOUT THE
TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS